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SIPDIS

KYIV ALSO FOR USAID  
AMEMBASSY MINSK SENDS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/06/2018  
TAGS: [AMGT](#) [APER](#) [CMGT](#) [PREL](#) [ABUD](#) [BO](#)  
SUBJECT: BELARUS: PROSPECTS FOR REGIME APPROVAL OF INCREASE  
IN USDH STAFFING

REF: A. VILNIUS 940  
[1](#)B. VILNIUS 941

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This message builds on ref A, which provides a report on the current status of operations at Embassy Minsk.

[1](#)2. (C) Post anticipates that Lukashenka -- who is under increasing economic pressure and is now seeking a USD 2 billion loan for the IMF as reported ref B -- may soon make some steps in an attempt to appease the U.S. and EU and obtain additional sanctions relief. In general, we and the EU should watch any GOB moves with scrutiny and skepticism, and focus on those which are not easily reversible. As a specific bilateral issue, it is possible that the GOB will offer the return of some or all of the U.S. diplomats who were forced to leave Embassy Minsk in March and May. It is our strong recommendation that we not act too readily on any such offer.

[1](#)3. (C) When Belarusian dictator Lukashenka forced our Ambassador out of his residence about nine years ago, the USG requested a letter from Lukashenka pledging to respect the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations before/before we returned our Ambassador to Belarus. We should request nothing less than that in this case: clear, written confirmation from the highest level for the U.S. Embassy to be staffed as the USG sees fit, without any regard to the exact number. It would be unconscionable to bring USG personnel to Minsk with anything less; the inherent lack of stability and strategy in Lukashenka's approach could mean that the number of GOB-approved USDH staff might fluctuate again based on the dictator's whim. A letter from him would not be a guarantee, but would help to put the matter of staffing behind us; no embassies have been challenged on residential issues since the last letter was provided in 2000.

[1](#)4. (C) Should such a letter be forthcoming, as a practical point, post anticipates that USDH staffing would not soon reach the pre-March 2008 level of 35. Beyond the five positions now at post -- Charge/DCM/POL/ECON, MGT/GSO/FMO/HR, CONS/PAO, RSO, and IMO -- and contingent on DS and OBO views, we would first expect to return a six-person MSG detachment to Minsk and two PA&E contractors to permit us to resume using our chancery. We would also ask USAID to return the FSO position moved in March 2008 from Minsk to Kyiv. For State personnel, with or without the assignment/arrival of a COM, we would hope for: a consular officer to allow the resumption of full NIV operations, a POL/ECON officer, a PAO, and an OMS.

[1](#)5. (C) We will continue to this issue closely and appreciate the Department's continued support for our difficult situation.  
CLOUD